

HOOD RIVER WATERSHED GROUP

2022 Annual Report

For 25 years, the Hood River Watershed Group has been sustaining and improving the Hood River Watershed through education, cooperation, and stewardship.

2022 was a productive and transitional year for the Watershed Group! We became an independent nonprofit organization in June and, with an inaugural six-member board, began laying the groundwork for our own fiscal and employment management, which started on September 1st. In October, 60 watershed members and guests gathered at pFriem Family Brewers to celebrate our 25-year anniversary! The event brought together new and long-time members and highlighted the Watershed Group's resiliency and growth. Finally, our board-development committee recruited four new board members who were introduced at the November Watershed Group meeting and begin their terms in January 2023.

Over the Watershed Group's 25-year history, we have fostered collaboration and stewardship among irrigation districts, tribes, government agencies, the agricultural community, businesses, and watershed residents. Collaboration among watershed partners has led to restoration of over 10 miles of fish habitat, removal of fish passage barriers that reconnected over 40 miles of stream habitat, and the piping of 115+ miles of open irrigation canals that led to increased streamflows.

We look forward to another 25 years of collaboration around protecting and restoring this incredible watershed and the resources it provides us every day. Thank you for supporting the continuation and expansion of this critical restoration and conservation work.

Cindy Thieman, Executive Director
& Alix Danielsen, Restoration & Outreach Project Manager



\$1,059,138 in grant funds secured for restoration & conservation projects



Over 3/4 mile of fish habitat restored



11 log jams, 2 alcoves, & over 640 feet of side channel created



2022 WATERSHED GROUP PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Habitat Restoration Projects

Neal Creek Fish Habitat Restoration

Neal Creek is one of the few clear water (non-glacial) tributaries of the lower Hood River and provides habitat for winter steelhead, coho salmon, cutthroat trout, and resident rainbow trout. The Watershed Group and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS) have been working with private landowners to mitigate the effects of past land management by reconnecting the creek with its floodplain and improving fish habitat instream for threatened steelhead and salmon in the watershed.

In 2022, we completed the second phase of Neal Creek habitat restoration, which included the creation of 2 new side channels totaling 640 feet of new off-channel habitat, 2 alcoves, and 11 log jams! We added over 100 pieces of large wood and 45 boulders back into Neal Creek. With the completion of the two project phases, we have enhanced a total of 1.25 miles of Neal Creek and its floodplain.

Neal Creek Phase 2 was implemented with funding from CTWS (\$260,000), the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (\$85,402), USFS Title II RAC (\$19,995), and One Tree Planted (\$2,000).

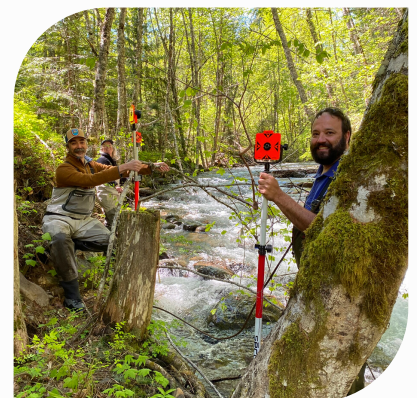


Evans Creek Fish Passage Project

Evans Creek is a low gradient, clear water tributary to the East Fork Hood River, making it an important refuge for ESA-listed steelhead and coho. At the project site managed by Hood River County, two fish passage barriers were removed in 2019, opening up approximately 1.3 miles of spawning and rearing habitat and restoring 400 feet of stream channel downstream of the new road crossing. Since 2020, the Watershed Group has been helping the County revegetate and improve a wetland mitigation site and the stream channel. In 2022, we hosted an Earth Day work party, and worked with volunteers to adjust large wood in the stream, improve channel banks, and revegetate the project site.

Tony Creek Fish Passage Project

The Watershed Group is working with CTWS and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to restore fish passage at a diversion dam on Tony Creek, one of two remaining high priority fish passage barriers in the watershed. Tony Creek is an important clearwater tributary to the glacial Middle Fork Hood River, with populations of ESA-listed spring Chinook, winter steelhead, coho, and bull trout, as well as resident cutthroat trout. The Watershed Group received design funding from ODFW (\$94,820) and the Pacific Power Blue Sky Habitat Fund (\$33,926.24), and is working with the landowner and water right holder on design development. Implementation is planned for 2023.



2022 WATERSHED GROUP PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Water Conservation Projects



In July, Senator Merkley visited infrastructure projects, including EFID's Eastside Lateral Pipeline Project

East Fork Irrigation District Water Conservation Projects

The East Fork Irrigation District (EFID) set a record for water conservation funding awards in 2022, securing almost \$17 million! \$13.4 million was awarded from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, \$2 million from Bureau of Reclamation, approximately \$823,000 from Oregon Water Resources Department, \$408,000 from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and \$262,000 from CTWS. Substantial recent commitments by the federal government to fund water and other infrastructure across the country contributed heavily to the awards. But it's important to note that EFID was poised for these awards because of the hard work and contributions of many partners over the past several years, including Farmers Conservation Alliance, the Watershed Group, CTWS, and EFID staff.

EFID was also able to complete piping projects on a number of distribution lines last year, including the 'Lariza Line', 'Sheirbon Hill', and a portion of 'Whiskey Creek'. They also completed designs for telemetry control of EFID's delivery system and the upcoming Oanna-Yasui pipeline project. A shout out goes to design-engineer Niklas Christensen, EFID manager Steve Pappas, and EFID office manager Veronica Glenn who worked overtime to get these projects designed and implemented.

Community Engagement

The Watershed Group held four public presentations in 2022, with topics including eDNA fish monitoring and the Hood River Forest Collaborative. You can re-watch all presentations on our website. We also gave tours of the West Fork at Red Hill and Neal Creek Phase 2 Habitat Restoration Projects. In April, we hosted an Earth Day work party with support from pFriem Family Brewers. 25 volunteers spread over 20 yards of mulch, planted native trees and shrubs, and pulled an impressive amount of Scotch broom! In the fall, we partnered with Hood River Valley Parks and Recreation to cut back blackberry along Indian Creek Trail. Join us in 2023 for more volunteer opportunities! Thank you to the Jubitz Family Foundation for supporting this work.



Monitoring



The Watershed Group monitors restoration projects to evaluate if restoration actions are having their intended effect and to improve future projects. In 2022, in partnership with CTWS, the Forest Service and volunteers, we monitored stream habitat and channel morphology at the Odell Creek Dam Removal, Neal Creek Phase 1 and 2, West Fork at Red Hill, West Fork at Jones, and Evans Creek restoration sites. We also conduct water temperature monitoring in partnership with the Middle Fork Irrigation District to evaluate changes to stream temperature over time and evaluate the impacts of management actions, and we support CTWS in their annual spawning surveys. 2022 was a record return year for spring Chinook!



LOOKING UPSTREAM TO 2023

In 2023, the Watershed Group will be working on:

- Implementing and supporting several habitat restoration and water conservation projects, including a fish passage project on Tony Creek;
- Developing a Watershed Restoration Monitoring Plan;
- Working with CTWS, other partners, and landowners to develop designs for habitat restoration projects on the Lower East Fork Hood River;
- Fostering new partnerships with our watershed community and businesses, and;
- Pursuing funding to support priority projects outlined in Watershed 2040.



WHO WE ARE

Staff

Cindy Thieman, Executive Director

Alix Danielsen, Restoration & Outreach Project Manager

Board of Directors

Chuck Gehling

Les Perkins

Sam Doak

Lilian Dick

Greg Short

Chuti Fiedler

Alexis Vaivoda

Felipe Mendez

Hilary Doulos

Core Partners

Hood River Soil & Water Conservation District (HRSWCD), Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS), East Fork Irrigation District (EFID), Middle Fork Irrigation District (MFID), Farmers Irrigation District (FID), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), & Columbia Land Trust (CLT).



The Watershed Group is the designated watershed council for the Hood River Basin. We work with private landowners, community members, irrigation districts, tribes, farmers, foresters, and agencies to improve watershed health through projects including stream and riparian habitat restoration, irrigation modernization, water quality monitoring, fish screening at water diversions, fish passage barrier removal, and more.

We would love to work with YOU in 2023!

Contact us or join our mailing list to learn about volunteer and stewardship opportunities in the watershed!

Learn more about the Watershed Group:

www.hoodriverwatershed.org

Instagram & Facebook: @hoodriverwatershed

Monthly Watershed Group presentations take place most months on the fourth Tuesday of the month from 6-7pm.

Join our mailing list for meeting reminders, volunteer opportunities, and project updates!

Thank you to our funders for making this work possible, including the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, Pacific Power Blue Sky Fund, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, the Jubitz Family Foundation, pFriem Family Brewers, and individual donors!